



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ART. VIII. — *Ion ; a Tragedy, in Five Acts.* By THOMAS NOON TALFOURD. New York ; George Dearborn & Co. 12mo. pp. 109.

THIS remarkable poem has justly called to itself more attention than any other work of the times. Mr. Sergeant Talfourd, its author, is an eminent lawyer, and a member of the British House of Commons. He was, previously to the publication of this poem, well known among the members of his profession, as a gentleman of distinguished ability and literary taste ; but out of his profession, and particularly on this side of the water, he was unknown to fame, until his "*Ion*" set him at once on the very pinnacle. He was trained in classical studies by the celebrated Dr. Valpy, perhaps the ablest teacher of his day in England, and the first edition is dedicated, in terms of almost filial affection, to that excellent man. There are few things more gratifying in human life than such testimonies of respect from a pupil to the instructor of his youth. We can easily imagine the emotions of pride and delight with which the veteran scholar welcomed this beautiful memorial of the genius and taste which he had himself done so much to foster.

"*Ion*" is evidently the work of many years. It is constructed on the principles of the Grecian drama, and is, on the whole, the most successful reproduction of the antique spirit with which we are acquainted. The simplicity of the Attic drama, by which great and impressive results are wrought out with few means, is very hard to imitate. The heroic elevation of sentiment, which gives a solemn grandeur to the best pieces of Æschylus and Sophocles, belonged to the patriotic and mythical subjects, to which the national mind turned with fondness and enthusiasm ; but to create anew an interest in those venerable themes, is a work to task the mightiest and most comprehensive genius. Modern attempts have accordingly been for the most part unsuccessful. They have been either stiff and pedantic imitations, painfully elaborated from a learned brain, or, like the French drama, under the ancient order, have veiled, beneath a strict adherence to unessential forms, essential departures from the genuine aim and spirit of the classic theatre.

Mr. Talfourd has been remarkably successful in two respects. His tragedy is at once true to the antique models, and deeply interesting to the mere modern reader. The classical scholar, as he reads its exquisite pages, can hardly escape the delusive impression that he has found a long-lost work of Sophocles. Its harmonious lines, to his ear, sound like the old Greek iambics, into which they fall so readily that at times he hardly knows whether he is reading Greek or English. The reader, whose knowledge is bounded by the literature of his mother tongue, finds in it such clear conceptions of character, such a polished and melodious versification, such rich and enchanting imagery, that he yields his spirit to the master's spell, "he knows not why, and cares not wherefore." He rises from its perusal with a pervading sense of beauty, which no other late poem can give him. It is all high thought nobly expressed. It is heroic sentiment and sublime action, tempered and subdued with the softest and most delicate humanity.

"*Ion*," we have said, is an imitation of antique models; but in no sense that can derogate from its merits as a noble original. The author shows himself, not simply familiar with

" what the lofty, grave tragedians taught
In chorus or iambic, teachers best
Of moral prudence, with delight received,
In brief, sententious precepts, while they treat
Of fate and chance, and change in human life;
High actions and high passions best describing,"

but, what is far more uncommon, deeply imbued with their spirit. He has written as if he had lived in a classic land and grown up in the nurture of heroic traditions; as if he felt, like a countryman, the woes of the house of Pelops and Thyestes, and the doom of an inexorable fate. He is true to the antique, not only in spirit, but in the accessories. The circumstances with which he surrounds the personages in the play, are thoroughly Greek; and the natural scenery, in the midst of which we are placed, brings up in memory many an exquisite scene in Sophocles.

The leading idea of the hero's character, as Mr. Talfourd observes in the Preface to his first edition, is borrowed from the "*Ion*" of Euripides; but nothing more. *Ion*, in the Greek play, is a foundling educated in the temple of Apollo at Delphi, and proves to be the son of Apollo and Creusa, an

Athenian princess. The princess, after the birth of *Ion*, is married to *Xuthus*, by the command of her father *Erectheus*. Having remained long childless, they resolve to consult the oracle, and there *Creusa* discovers that *Ion* is her own son. It would be doing gross injustice to Mr. Talfourd to say, that the play of *Euripides* is equal in any respect to his. With the exception of the beautiful song of *Ion*, at the opening of the piece, the Grecian drama has but little to recommend it. The dialogues are slovenly and tedious. The characters are low, and the moral feeling is vulgar throughout. But it must be remembered that the play was written after the pure and simple taste of the Athenian stage had begun to decline; and that even *Euripides* *had* produced several tragedies of the loftiest tone. It must have been the impression made by a few pieces like the *Alcestis*, on the mind of Mr. Talfourd, that dictated the eulogy he has pronounced on the "*Ion*" of *Euripides*.

The plot of Mr. Talfourd's "*Ion*," though Greek in character, is entirely of his own invention. The birth of a prince of *Argos* is accompanied by a terrific announcement, that

"Against the life which now begins shall life
Lighted from thence be armed, and, both soon quenched,
End this great line in sorrow."

Doomed thus from the moment of his birth, the unhappy prince is regarded with dread and suspicion by the courtiers, and even by his own parents. Meantime a second son is born, on whom the favor due the first is lavished. He is accidentally killed, and his elder brother is suspected of having murdered him. In despair at the harsh treatment and cruel suspicions of which he is the innocent object, *Adrastus* flies from the society of his companions, and roves the woods, or plunges into the deep. He meets by accident a lovely maiden, engaged in the pious duty of bestowing the rites of sepulture on her father,

"And soon two lovely ones by holy rites
Became one happy being."

His sylvan home is tracked by his father's spies, just as a son is given him, and the infant is seized by ruffians, to avert the foretold catastrophe of the royal house. He is borne to a rock that beetled over the deep; but one of the murderers, stepping upon a loosened crag, falls headlong, and perishes in

the waters. The other, in whose arms the child is carried, terrified at his companion's fate, lays the infant in the sacred grove, where he is found by attendants of the temple. He is brought up under the fostering care of the aged priest. These are the few circumstances in the history of the leading characters which the progress of the action brings to light.

At the opening of the play, Adrastus is already king of Argos, and the city is afflicted with the pestilence. The first scene is in the temple of Apollo, placed on a rocky height, above the city. The foundling has become a youth of gracious promise, a favorite inmate of the temple. Agenor, one of the sages of Argos, in the scene just referred to, thus describes Ion, who has been permitted by Medon,

'To visit the sad city at his will :

And freely does he use the dangerous boon,
Which, in my thought, the love that cherished him,
Since he was found within the sacred grove
Smiling amidst the storm, a most rare infant,
Should have had sternness to deny.

AGENOR.

What, Ion

The only inmate of this fane allowed
To seek the mournful walks where death is busy ! —
Ion, our sometime darling, whom we prized
As a stray gift, by bounteous Heaven dismissed
From some bright sphere which sorrow may not cloud,
To make the happy happier ! Is *he* sent
To grapple with the miseries of this time,
Whose nature such ethereal aspect wears
As it would perish at the touch of wrong ?
By no internal contest is he trained
For such hard duty ; no emotions rude
Have his clear spirit vanquished ; — Love, the germ
Of his mild nature, hath spread graces forth,
Expanding with its progress, as the store
Of rainbow color which the seed conceals
Sheds out its tints from its dim treasury,
To flush and circle in the flower. No tear
Hath filled his eye, save that of thoughtful joy
When, in the evening stillness, lovely things
Pressed on his soul too busily ; his voice,
If, in the earnestness of childish sports,
Raised to the tone of anger, checked its force,

As if it feared to break its being's law,
And faltered into music ; when the forms
Of guilty passion have been made to live
In pictured speech, and others have waxed loud
In righteous indignation, he hath heard
With skeptic smile, or from some slender vein
Of goodness, which surrounding gloom concealed,
Struck sunlight o'er it. So his life hath flowed
From its mysterious urn a sacred stream,
In whose calm depth the beautiful and pure
Alone are mirrored ; which, though shapes of ill
May hover round its surface, glides in light,
And takes no shadow from them." — pp. 5, 6.

Adrastus, urged by Medon the high priest, has sent Phocion to consult the Delphic oracle. Impatient at his long delay, and driven to desperation by the raging of the pestilence, the king has shut himself up in his palace, accompanied by a few courtiers, and surrounded by the soldiers of the royal guard, to drown in mad revelry all sense of present ill, and all foreboding of coming destruction. The Sages have already sent him an humble entreaty that he would meet them in council. The messenger has been driven back in disgrace, and the king has decreed that whoever next appears unbidden before his presence shall die. Ion already feels the great task of his life pressing supernaturally upon his spirit, and thus pleads to be sent on this dangerous mission.

“ O Sages, do not think my prayer
Bespeaks unseemingly forwardness, — send me !
The coarsest reed that trembles in the marsh,
If Heaven select it for its instrument,
May shed celestial music on the breeze
As clearly as the pipe whose virgin gold
Befits the lip of Phœbus ; — ye are wise,
And needed by your country ; ye are fathers ;
I am a lone, stray thing, whose little life
By strangers' bounty cherished, like a wave
That from the summer sea a wanton breeze
Lifts for a moment's sparkle, will subside
Light as it rose, nor leave a sigh in breaking.

MEDON.

Ion, no sigh !

ION.

Forgive me if I seemed
 To doubt that thou wilt mourn me if I fall ;
 Nor would I tax thy love with such a fear,
 But that high promptings, which could never rise
 Spontaneous in my nature, bid me plead
 Thus boldly for the mission.

MEDON.

My brave boy !
 It shall be as thou wilt. I see thou 'rt called
 To this great peril, and I will not stay thee.
 When wilt thou be prepared to seek it ?

ION.

Now.

Only before I go, thus, on my knee,
 Let me in one word thank thee for a life
 Made by thy love a cloudless holyday ;
 And O, my more than father ! let me look
 Up to thy face as if indeed a father's,
 And give me a son's blessing !

MEDON.

Bless thee, son !
 I should be marble now ; let 's part at once.

ION.

If I should not return, bless Phocion from me ;
 And, for Clemanthe, — may I speak one word,
 One parting word with my fair playfellow ?

MEDON.

If thou would'st have it so, thou shalt.

ION.

Farewell then !

Your prayers wait on my steps. The arm of Heaven
 I feel in life or death will be around me. [Exit.

MEDON.

O grant it be in life ! Let 's to the sacrifice. [Excunt."
 — pp. 12 – 14.

Ion has unconsciously become attached to Clemanthe, the priest's daughter. The interview between them, which closes the first act, is one of the most beautiful passages of the poem.

In the second act, the king admits Ion to his presence, having forewarned him of the fatal consequence of his intrusion. Ion, with a sad constancy, persists in delivering his message. The king is overcome by the noble firmness of the youth, and the memory of past days is revived by tones and looks that remind him of her who has been long lost to him. He yields to the irresistible fascination, and relates to Ion the history of his life; then consents to meet the Sages. Meantime Phocion arrives with the response of the oracle, which he is sworn to deliver first to the king.

The following is a part of the scene between Adrastus and the councillors.

ADRASTUS.

“Upon your summons, Sages, I am here;
Your king attends to know your pleasure; speak it!

AGENOR.

And canst thou ask? If the heart dead within thee
Receives no impress of this awful time,
Art thou of sense forsaken? Are thine ears
So charmed by strains of slavish minstrelsy,
That the dull groan and frenzy-pointed shriek
Pass them unheard to Heaven? Or are thine eyes
So conversant with prodigies of grief,
They cease to dazzle at them? Art thou armed
'Gainst wonder, while, in all things, Nature turns
To dreadful contraries; — while Youth's full cheek
Is shrivelled into furrows of sad years,
And 'neath its glossy curls untinged by care
Looks out a keen anatomy; — while Age
Is stung by feverish torture for an hour
Into youth's strength; — while fragile Womanhood
Starts into frightful courage, all unlike
The gentle strength its gentle weakness feeds
To make affliction beautiful, and stalks
Abroad, a tearless, an unshuddering thing; —
While Childhood, in its orphaned freedom blithe,
Finds, in the shapes of wretchedness which seem
Grotesque to its unsaddened vision, cause
For dreadful mirth that shortly shall be hushed
In never-broken silence; — and while Love,
Immortal through all change, makes ghastly Death
Its idol, and with furious passion digs
Amid sepulchral images for gauds

To cheat its fancy with ? — Do sights like these
Glare through the realm thou shouldst be parent to,
And canst thou find the voice to ask 'our pleasure' ?

ADRASTUS.

Cease, babbler ; — wherefore would ye stun my ears
With vain recital of the griefs I know,
And cannot heal ? — will treason turn aside
The shafts of fate, or medicine Nature's ills ?
I have no skill in pharmacy, nor power
To sway the elements.

AGENOR.

Thou hast the power
To cast thyself upon the earth with us
In penitential shame ; or, if this power
Hath left a heart made weak by luxury
And hard by pride, thou hast at least the power
To cease the mockery of thy frantic revels.

ADRASTUS.

I have yet power to punish insult, — look
I use it not, Agenor ! — Fate may dash
My sceptre from me, but shall not command
My will to hold it with a feeblér grasp ;
Nay, if few hours of empire yet are mine,
They shall be colored with a sterner pride,
And peopled with more lustrous joys than flushed
In the serene procession of its greatness,
Which looked perpetual, as the flowing course
Of human things. Have ye beheld a pine
That clasped the mountain-summit with a root
As firm as its rough marble, and, apart
From the huge shade of undistinguished trees,
Lifted its head as in delight to share
The evening glories of the sky, and taste
The wanton dalliance of the heavenly breeze
That no ignoble vapor from the vale
Could mingle with, — smit by the flaming marl,
And lighted for destruction ? How it stood
One glorious moment, fringed and wreathed with fire
Which showed the inward graces of its shape,
Uncumbered now, and midst its topmost boughs,
That young Ambition's airy fancies made
Their giddy nest, leaped sportive ; — never clad
By liberal summer in a pomp so rich
As waited on its downfall, while it took

The storm-cloud rolled behind it for a curtain
 To gird its splendors round, and made the blast
 Its minister to whirl its flashing shreds
 Aloft towards heaven, or to the startled depths
 Of forests that afar might share its doom !
 So shall the royalty of Argos pass
 In festal blaze to darkness ! Have ye spoken ? ”

— pp. 43 – 46.

The assembly breaks up in confusion, and the king returns to the palace to resume the banquet. His doom is now sealed, and Ion is irresistibly impressed with the conviction that he is to be the avenger.

ION.

“ O wretched man, thy words have sealed thy doom !
 Why should I shiver at it, when no way,
 Save this, remains to break the ponderous cloud
 That hangs above my wretched country ? — death, —
 A single death, the common lot of all,
 Which it will not be mine to look upon, —
 And yet its ghastly shape dilates before me ;
 I cannot shut it out ; my thoughts grow rigid,
 And as that dim and prostrate figure haunts them,
 My sinews stiffen like it. Courage, Ion !
 No spectral form is here ; all outward things
 Wear their own old familiar looks ; no dye
 Pollutes them. Yet the air has scent of blood,
 And now it eddies with a hurtling sound,
 As if some weapon swiftly clove it. No, —
 The falchion’s course is silent as the grave
 That yawns before its victim. Gracious powers !
 If the great duty of my life be near,
 Grant it may be to suffer, not to strike ! ” — pp. 50, 51.

The third act opens with a dialogue between Ion and Clemanthe.

CLEMANTHE.

“ Nay, I must chide this sorrow from thy brow,
 Or ’t will rebuke my happiness ; — I know
 Too well the miseries that hem us round ;
 And yet the inward sunshine of my soul,
 Unclouded by their melancholy shadows,
 Bathes in its deep tranquillity one image, —
 One only image, which no outward storm
 Can ever ruffle. Let me wean thee, then,
 From this vain pondering o’er the general woe,
 Which makes my joy look ugly.

ION.

No, my fair one,
 'The gloom that wrongs thy love is unredeemed
 By generous sense of others' woe ; too sure
 It rises from dark presages within,
 And will not from me.

CLEMANTHE.

Then it is most groundless !
 Hast thou not won the blessings of the perishing
 By constancy, the fame of which shall live
 While a heart beats in Argos ? hast thou not
 Upon one agitated bosom poured
 The sweetest peace ? and can thy generous nature,
 While it thus sheds felicity around it,
 Remain itself unblessed ?

ION.

I strove awhile
 To think the assured possession of thy love
 With too divine a burden weighed my heart
 And pressed my spirits down ; — but 't is not so ;
 Nor will I with false tenderness beguile thee,
 By feigning that my sadness has a cause
 So exquisite. Clemanthe ! thou wilt find me
 A sad companion ; — I, who knew not life,
 Save as the sportive breath of happiness,
 Now feel my minutes teeming, as they rise,
 With grave experiences ; I dream no more
 Of azure realms, where restless beauty sports
 In myriad shapes fantastic ; but black vaults
 In long succession open till the gloom
 Afar is broken by a streak of fire
 That shapes my name ; the fearful wind, that moans
 Before the storm, articulates its sound ;
 And as I passed but now the solemn range
 Of Argive monarchs, that in sculptured mockery
 Of present empire sit, their eyes of stone
 Bent on me instinct with a frightful life
 That drew me into fellowship with them,
 As conscious marble ; while their ponderous lips, —
 Fit organs of eternity, — unclosed,
 And, as I live to tell thee, murmured ' Hail !
 Hail ! ION THE DEVOTED ! ' ' ' — pp. 52, 53.

A conspiracy is already formed by noble Argive youths to
 put the king to death. The place of meeting is a deep wood,

with an ancient altar. As *Ion* approaches the spot, he utters the following soliloquy.

“O winding pathways, o’er whose scanty blades
Of unaspiring grass mine eyes have bent
So often, when by musing fancy swayed,
That craved alliance with no wider scene
Than your fair thickets bordered, but was pleased
To deem the toilsome years of manhood flown,
And, on the pictured mellowness of age
Idly reflective, image my return
From careful wanderings, to find ye gleam
With unchanged aspect on a heart unchanged,
And melt the busy past to a sweet dream
As then the future was; — why should ye now
Echo my steps with melancholy sound
As ye were conscious of a guilty presence?
The lovely light of eve, that, as it waned,
Touched ye with softer, homelier look, now fades
In dismal blackness; and yon twisted roots
Of ancient trees, with whose fantastic forms
My thoughts grew humorous, look terrible,
As if about to start to serpent life,
And hiss around me; — whither shall I turn? —
Where fly? — I see the myrtle-cradled spot
Where human love instructed by divine
Found and embraced me first; I’ll cast me down
Upon that earth as on a mother’s breast,
In hope to feel myself again a child.”

— p. 57.

He breaks upon the conspirators just as they have bound themselves to the fulfilment of their great purpose, and determined to decide by lot who shall do the deed. The lot falls upon *Ion*, who devotes himself to the will of destiny, in a speech of solemn grandeur, that breathes the very spirit of *Æschylus*. After another interview with *Clemanthe*, *Ion* departs on his terrible mission. Meantime *Irus*, the slave of *Agenor*, bears to *Medon* a scroll, from a kinsman lying on his death-bed. That kinsman is one of the ruffians to whom the infant *Ion* was intrusted, and the scroll reveals to *Medon* the true lineage of the foundling. He imparts the secret to *Clemanthe*, and learns from her the fatal deed about to be committed.

In the fourth act, *Ion* creeps stealthily to the chamber of

the king. Medon rushes in just as his arm is raised to plunge the dagger into his father's bosom, and arrests the deadly purpose. He shows to Adrastus the proofs of his son's birth. The other conspirators, impatient of the delay, hurry to the royal chamber, and one of them, Ctesiphon, whose father has been the object of royal insult, stabs the king. This is followed by a scene of exquisite tenderness between Adrastus and his long-lost son, at the end of which the king dies. Ion prepares to fulfil his yet remaining duty ; for the oracle has declared that the royal race must perish. The other conspirators, thinking that Ion has forgotten the vow, determine to accomplish it themselves, and Phocion attempts to assassinate him, but is disarmed. In the succeeding dialogue Ion declares his purpose to fulfil the oracle.

The fifth act opens with a dialogue between the soldiers on guard. Preparations are making for the coronation of the new king. The interview between Ion and Clemanthe at the Temple breathes the purest spirit of tenderness and truth.

The last scene represents the great square of the city, surrounded by the pomp of coronation ; a throne, an altar, and statues decked with garlands. Ion sits on the throne of his fathers, and calls out the old Sages, upon whom he devolves the councils of the state ; he banishes Crythes, and the royal guards, and exacts from the assembled Argives an oath that when he is dead, the welfare of the state shall never be intrusted to a monarch's will. The scene and the play thus end.

ION.

" Hear and record the oath, immortal powers !

Now give me leave a moment to approach

That altar unattended. [*He goes to the altar.*]

Gracious gods !

In whose mild service my glad youth was spent,

Look on me now ; — and if there is a Power,

As at this solemn time I feel there is,

Beyond ye, that hath breathed through all your shapes

The spirit of the beautiful that lives

In earth and heaven ; — to ye I offer up

This conscious being, full of life and love

For my dear country's welfare. Let this blow

End all her sorrows !

[*Stabs himself, and falls. Ctesiphon rushes to support him.*]

Ctesiphon, thou art
 Avenged, and wilt forgive me.

CTESIPHON.

Thou hast plucked
 The poor disguise of hatred from my soul,
 And made me feel how shallow is the wish
 Of vengeance. Could I die to save thee !

Clemanthe rushes forward.

CLEMANTHE.

Hold !
 Let me support him — stand away — indeed
 I have best right, although ye know it not,
 To cling to him in death.

ION.

This is a joy
 I did not hope for — this is sweet indeed. —
 Bend thine eyes on me !

CLEMANTHE.

And for this it was
 Thou wouldst have weaned me from thee ? Couldst thou
 think
 I would be so divorced ?

ION.

Thou art right, Clemanthe, —
 It was a shallow and an idle thought !
 'T is past ; no show of coldness frets us now ;
 No vain disguise, my love. Yet thou wilt think
 On that which, when I feigned, I truly said —
 Wilt thou not, sweet one ?

CLEMANTHE.

I will treasure all.

Enter Irus.

IRUS.

I bring you glorious tidings — Ha ! no joy
 Can enter here.

ION.

Yes — is it as I hope ?

IRUS.

The pestilence abates.

ION. [*springs upon his feet.*]

Do ye not hear ?

Why shout ye not ? — ye are strong — think not of me ;

Hearken ! the curse my ancestry had spread
O'er Argos, is dispelled — Agenor, give
This gentle youth his freedom, who hath brought
Sweet tidings that I shall not die in vain —
And Medon ! cherish him as thou hast one
Who dying blesses thee ; — my own Clemanthe !
I et this console thee also — Argos lives —
'I he offering is accepted — all is well ! [Dies.]
— pp. 107 — 109.

This sketch will give those of our readers, who have not yet seen the tragedy, some notion of its character. The style of the whole piece is exquisitely refined ; it combines perfect simplicity with richness and splendor of ornament. It is the transparent medium of bright and clear thought, accompanied by the most delightful and poetical imagery. Every idea is brought out in the full crystalline distinctness, with which it sprang up in the author's mind. This is the point in which the long-continued labor of the poet is most manifest ; and it shows the wise and just taste, which guided him in its composition. In saying that Mr. Talfourd's language is elaborate, we must not be understood to say that it has any of the qualities which usually belong to what is called an elaborate style. It is wholly free from pomp and affected splendor. It is subdued down to the utmost precision. Labor has been expended upon it ; but only to polish, simplify, and strengthen it ; to unfold, in all their beauty and harmony and just proportion, the great ideas which it embodies. Language, in Mr. Talfourd's hands, is like marble in the sculptor's. He has smoothed its roughness, removed every superfluous particle, and worked it into a form of symmetrical beauty, and strong, but well-restrained passion, over which time will have as little power as over the Venus and the Apollo.

We have spoken of the merits of "*Ion*," considered as a reproduction of the spirit of the antique. On this point we must venture a few further observations. The plot has the simplicity and completeness of Sophocles. The characters are few, and actuated by few and obvious motives. The story is conducted in the antique manner. The destiny of a doomed house is brought about by the very measures taken to counteract it. Adrastus is driven forth by the harsh treatment of his father's courtiers, to seek in another's love the happiness forbidden him in his paternal halls. His infant son is

doomed to death, but is saved and trained up under all the influences that prepare him to be an instrument of asserting the will of the gods. Adrastus ascends the throne, after trials which have hardened his heart, like Pharaoh's, and made him a fit victim of the avengers. Thus in the general conduct of the plot, Mr. Talfourd has faithfully preserved the antique spirit. He has been equally faithful in minute particulars. The opening of the play presents us with a city filled with mourning and death by the pestilence. It is not an imitation, but it reminds us of the opening of the "*Œdipus Tyrannus*." Phocion is gone to inquire of the oracle, and the people are anxiously awaiting his return, — just as the Thebans are awaiting, around the altars and shrines of the gods, the return of Creon. He brings back a response, expressed in simple words, of epigrammatic brevity.

" Argos ne'er shall find release
Till her monarch's race shall cease."

So Creon, —

" — The god commands
That instant we drive forth the fatal cause
Of this dire pestilence, nor nourish here
The accursed monster." —

A writer in "*The Edinburgh Review*" has objected to the simplicity and apparent baldness of this response. But there is no ground for the objection. It is exactly in keeping with all that occur in Sophocles and Euripides, and a great many more scattered over the pages of Herodotus; exactly in keeping with the tone of ancient oracles, wherever and whenever uttered.

Those who are familiar with the Attic drama will be struck by the easy and graceful manner with which Mr. Talfourd imitates the turn of the Sophoclean dialogue. An example occurs in the interview between Ion and Adrastus.

ADRASTUS.

" Ere I grew
Of years to know myself a thing accursed,
A second son was born, to steal the love
Which fate had else scarce rifled: he became
My parents' hope, the darling of the crew
Who lived upon their smiles, and thought it flattery
To trace in every foible of my youth —
A prince's youth! — the workings of the curse;

My very mother — Jove ! I cannot bear
To speak it now — look'd freezingly upon me!

ION.

But thy brother —

ADRASTUS.

Died. Thou hast heard the lie,
The common lie that every peasant tells
Of me his master, — that I slew the boy.
'T is false ! One summer's eve, below a crag
Which, in his wilful mood, he strove to climb,
He lay a mangled corpse : the very slaves,
Whose cruelty had shut him from my heart,
Now coin'd their own injustice into proofs
To brand me as his murderer.

ION.

Did they dare

Accuse thee ?

ADRASTUS.

Not in open speech : — they felt
I should have seized the miscreant by the throat,
And crush'd the lie half-spoken with the life
Of the base speaker ; — but the tale look'd out
From the stolen gaze of coward eyes, which shrank
When mine have met them ; murmur'd through the crowd
That at the sacrifice, or feast, or game
Stood distant from me ; burnt into my soul
When I beheld it in my father's shudder !

ION.

Didst not declare thy innocence ? " — pp. 30, 31.

This resembles, but in manner only, the following ;

"*Ædipus*. Whence came the boy ? Was he thy own, or who
Did give him to thee ?

Shepherd. From another hand
I had received him.

Æd. Say, what hand ? from whom ?
Whence came he ?

Shep. Do not, by the gods I beg thee,
Do not inquire.

Æd. Force me to ask again,
And thou shalt die.

Shep. In Laius' palace born.

Æd. Son of a slave or of the king ?

Shep. Alas !

'T is death for me to speak," &c.

Other passages in the “*Ædipus Coloneus*” and “*Antigone*,” would sustain the same comparison.

Another striking characteristic in the Attic dialogue is this. The victim of fate is often made to use expressions, which, unknown to himself, foreshadow his destiny, or describe his present condition. As the story was generally known to the assembled people, these passages must often have had a thrilling effect. In the play already referred to, *Ædipus*, in a speech to the Theban people, declares his purpose to avenge the murder of the fallen king, that king being his own father and slain by his own hand.

“Wherefore I will avenge him as he were
My father.”

A hundred other examples of the same thing might easily be adduced. This characteristic turn has not escaped the eye of Mr. Talfourd, but he has repeatedly introduced it, with great effect. Thus *Ion*, after dedicating himself to the destruction of the king, at the altar ;

“*And if he has a child*
Whose blood is needful to the sacrifice
My country asks, harden my soul to shed it !”

These are examples of small traits, that would not perhaps generally be observed. They serve to show the minuteness of Mr. Talfourd's classical knowledge, and the delicacy of his imitation. Many more might be cited, but it is unnecessary.

We have heard it objected to “*Ion*,” that the characters are not distinctly drawn ; that there is more declamation than dramatic effect, in the poem. We think this objection arises from a misconception. It will not do to compare a play, constructed upon the principles of the ancients, with one of Shakspeare's, either in character or plot. The modern master, no doubt, is a more correct delineator of life and the passions, as they have been actually displayed. The Shakspearean drama is the world in miniature. To his eye “all the world is a stage” ; and the variety of his characters, the complexity of motives by which they are actuated, the blending of tragedy, comedy, and farce in the same piece, are copied from real life. But not so the ancients. Shakspeare resembles them, but it is in the expression of passions common to the whole race of man. They are alike true to nature, but only to the Universal Nature. In every thing else, they are at

an infinite distance apart. The ancients raised their characters to an ideal elevation above any actual form of human life. The heroes, demigods, and gods of a far off and fabulous age, blend with the mere human actors, just as the simple but majestic forms that have an ideal life in the memory of our childhood, mingle with the throng of beings that live and breathe around us in our manhood. The characters drawn and represented upon such a principle of art must of necessity be simple and grand. They must resemble the work of the sculptor; and it would be as absurd to try either the plot or characters of Sophocles by the dramatic standard of Shakspeare, as to compare the Medicean Venus with the portrait of Elizabeth, in the gorgeous costume of her age.

We do not see that Mr. Talfourd has failed in the point which the criticism above referred to would indicate. His characters, though simple, seem to us perfectly distinct. King Adrastus is finely and firmly drawn. *Ion* is a beautiful conception, and consistently carried out. His language is in the strictest keeping with the circumstances in which he is placed, and the traits unfolded by his actions. Clemanthe is a being, who, once known, becomes a part of our mind. Her delightful character appears at intervals in the mournful progress of the action, like a soft light gleaming through the broken clouds of a stormy day.

The appearance of this poem has convinced us of several things, which many people began to doubt. It has shown that however great may be the temporary admiration bestowed upon the hastily-written productions of the day, a true work of genius and art, carefully wrought out, and finished to the last degree, will at once outrank them. This single work of Mr. Talfourd has given more pleasure to the reader, and more fame to the writer, than all the red-hot productions of the intense school, which some are pleased to call poetry, put together. It has also shown that the theory, first propounded we believe by Mr. John Neal, and gravely repeated by Mr. Bulwer, that verse must give way to rhythmical prose in this enlightened age, has no real foundation. It is true that finished poetry has been almost frightened out of the literary world of late, by the abundance of prose run mad, let loose by Bulwer, D'Israeli, and others, just as sober gentlemen are driven from the streets by rabid dogs. But the "dogstar" has almost ceased to "rage," and "all Bedlam" will soon be shut up again.

Harmony and melody are natural expressions of the mind of man in its higher moods, and will remain so until he becomes another being. Rhythmical prose can no more take the place of verse, than rhythmical reading can supplant singing. Prose is no more poetry, than oratory is music. A discourse is not a song, any more than a talk on 'Change is an opera.

ART. IX. — 1. *Abstract of Massachusetts School Returns, for 1836. Prepared for the Use of the Legislature.* By JOHN P. BIGELOW, Secretary of the Commonwealth. Boston ; Dutton & Wentworth, Printers to the State. 1837. pp. 47.

2. *History of Massachusetts, for two hundred years, from 1620 to 1820.* By ALDEN BRADFORD, an Original Member of the Massachusetts Historical Society, and Honorary Member of the Historical Society of New York. Boston ; Hilliard, Gray, & Co. 1835. 8vo. pp. 480.

THE Abstract of Massachusetts School Returns for the last year, digested by the accurate and intelligent Secretary, agreeably to a resolve of the Legislature of the year 1826, embraces statements from 289 cities and towns, being the whole number of municipal corporations, with the exception of about twenty. They are divided into 2,517 School Districts, employing 2,154 male, and 2,816 female instructors. The schools were attended last year by 146,539 children, between four and sixteen years of age, (75,552 boys, and 70,987 girls,) and were supported by a tax levied by the towns and cities, respectively, amounting to \$391,993·96, and by voluntary contributions amounting to \$47,593·44 ; besides which, many towns (about 90,) have funds, the income of which is devoted to this object, all have their share of the \$20,000 interest of the State School Fund, and in many, the teacher derives part of his compensation from board furnished by families of the district. The additional amount paid for tuition in *private* schools and academies, is estimated at \$326,642·53, giving a total of \$726,229·93 *raised* last year in the towns reported, for the support of Common Schools, and Private Schools and Acad-